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A Generational Cohort Comparison of Endurance Sport Participant Involvement

Jason A. Rice

Abstract

While traditional team sport participation numbers are unstable, trends indicate individual endurance event participation is moving in the opposite direction. Simultaneously, Generation Y, North America's largest teen population in history, is entering its wealth accumulation stage. In an effort to understand more about this group and their potential influence on such trends, the purpose of the current study was to investigate involvement of endurance event participants within the Generation Y cohort and a comparison group of older generational cohorts. This research has applied an approach, whereby use of quantitative methods was utilized for sample selection and description, while qualitative methods were predominantly used to analyze the research questions. A cross-group comparative analysis was conducted with six Generation Y members and six non-Generation Y members across differing levels of involvement. While most study participants held comparable social influences along with achievement based motivations for participation, differences were present in the range of motivations present and obstacles encountered. Marketers may use promotions to leverage the post event euphoria experienced by participants to advocate their friends to join future events. Additionally, capitalizing on achievement motivations would be most effective in targeting Generation Y members.

Keywords: *sport involvement, generational cohort, participant sport, endurance sport.*

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As a new Millennial generation, unique in its attitudes and behaviors, begins to enter the wealth accumulation stage, the landscape of participant sport is experiencing unique trends. Recent figures have indicated declines in many traditional sports between 2008 and 2012 in the 6- to 18-year-old category; baseball, 7.1%; basketball, 8.3%; and American football, 5.4% (Wallerson, 2014). Simultaneously, some individual endurance event participation numbers are moving the opposite direction. The 2014 Annual Marathon Report estimates marathon participants grew to an all-time high with an estimated 541,000 runners completing a marathon in 2013 (Running USA, 2014a), and a record 1.96 million people finishing half marathons in the same year (Running USA, 2014b). Even larger, nontraditional running events, such as themed and obstacle runs, are producing an unprecedented 4 million finishers per year (Running USA, 2014c).

Simultaneous with this shift, a distinctive new generational cohort, Generation Y, is advancing in age and market impact. Generation Y, also called Millennials, were born from 1977 through 1994 (Stevens, Lathrop, & Bradish, 2005; Zhang, Bennett, & Henson, 2003). They are not only the largest teen population, approximately 78 million, in United States history (Noble, Haytko, & Phillips, 2009) but also possess a unique set of dominant characteristics. Unlike preceding generations at their current life stage, Millennials are described as confident, self-reliant, technologically savvy, diverse, open to change, service oriented, and expectant of immediate access to information (Young & Hinesly, 2012). Understanding how group characteristics influence their behavior is increasingly important as evidence suggests Generation Y may have a waning interest in many traditional sports (Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011).

As participation levels change, it is important to gain a better understanding of the individuals involved. A comprehension of the individuals contributing to the current sport landscape will allow us to better understand trends in sport participation. Previous research has asserted the importance in developing a stronger knowledge of the points of attachment individuals have with certain phenomenon (Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003) and what motivates or constrains individuals to participation in sport and leisure type activities (Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004; Kyle & Mowen, 2005). As a whole, research has shown that individuals participate in sport and leisure activities for a variety of reasons, even within the setting of endurance events (Ogles & Masters, 2000; Summers, Machin, & Sargent, 1983; Summers, Sargent, Levey, & Murray, 1982). Therefore, the purpose of the current research was to investigate motives and constraints endurance participants face within distinct generational cohorts.

General Theories of Sport/Leisure Involvement

Despite evidence of specific differences for individual sport involvement, general frameworks may guide research across a host of domains by providing a more universal description of behaviors. This level of analysis may allow for a broader perspective and permit researchers to cull out trends from within the data. Two

particular models of activity involvement, which share similarities, are considered for the current study. Iwasaki and Havitz's (1998) conceptual model of the relationships among involvement, psychological commitment, and behavioral loyalty, along with Funk and James' (2001) Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) fulfill the needs of the research and will assist with methodological procedures and analysis.

Iwasaki and Havitz's (1998) model has been found to display a fully mediated relationship between leisure involvement, psychological commitment, and loyalty (Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004). Only when participants develop high levels of psychological involvement, referred to as resistance to change, do they exhibit greater loyalty (Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004). Havitz and Dimanche (1997) defined involvement as "an unobservable state of motivation, arousal, or interest towards a recreation activity or associated product" (p. 247). Within Iwasaki and Havitz's (1998) model, involvement is considered to have two sources of antecedents: personal and social-situational. Personal antecedents include attitudes, motivations, needs, and intrapersonal constraints, while social-situational antecedents are those such as social support, social norms, and structural constraints.

Built on similar tenets, the PCM is a stage-based model for explaining the levels of psychological connection an individual makes with a sport product (Funk & James, 2001). These connections are considered to be described along four distinct stages of awareness, attraction, attachment, and allegiance. Awareness occurs when an individual knowingly does not participate in the activity. Once an individual consciously decides to participate in the activity they have moved on to the next stage, attraction. After preferences for the behavior have been established and attitudes and meaning are given to the activity, the individual may move to the next stage, attachment (Funk & James, 2001). In the final stage, allegiance, the object has demonstrated an internal significance within the individual which is not likely to change (Funk & James, 2001). The PCM and Iwasaki and Havitz's (1998) model are similar in that both have also operationalized involvement with the same facets of attraction, sign, and centrality as established by Kyle and Mowen (2005).

Socializing Agents

The process by which an individual acquires and interacts with antecedents to sport/leisure involvement has been explained by social learning theory (Bandura, 1971) which suggests behavioral outcomes are a result of a cognitive process stimulated by the social environment. Potential stimulus for such involvement may come from a variety of sources. Researchers have asserted we become familiar with leisure opportunities and develop attitudes toward these interests as a result of influence by agents, most commonly significant others, as well as personal attributes and socializing situations (Bandura, 1971).

A sensible place to begin the analysis is with identifying how individuals were introduced to the activity. Socializing agents across both leisure/sport (Ruddell

& Shinenw, 2006) and consumer behavior studies (Barber, 2013) have been found to be similar: family, peers, and media. Research has also indicated that parental influences are strongest during adolescent years (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). As consumers age, parental influence declines and is replaced by peer and media influences (Barber, 2013). In his study, Barber (2013) described how consumers, Generation Y members in particular, have difficulty making decisions on their own and rely on social networks to make product recommendations.

Frequently, family, friends, and peers are viewed as trustworthy information sources because the message sender is often not affiliated with the seller and not trying to sway the audience's decision. Lim and Chung (2013) found consumers may rely on experienced senders of word of mouth messages for brands which they are unfamiliar. With evidence showing a decreased interest in team sport from Generation Y (Wallerson, 2014) and an increase in endurance sport participation, the importance for sport marketers to understand how socializing agents aid sport introduction becomes evident. If peer-to-peer socializing agents are found to be instrumental in participant decision making, marketers will need to encourage and facilitate this behavior. For these reasons, sources of sport introduction were invested in the current study.

Attraction/Sign/Centrality

In developing a comprehensive view of activity participation, other important areas to understand are found within the leisure/sport participation models presented. Placement along PCM stages (Beaton et al., 2009) and along Iwasaki and Havitz's (2004) measure of involvement is considered to be a reflection of three facets: attraction, sign, and centrality as established by Kyle and Mowen (2005). Attraction is considered to be a combination of the hedonic pleasures and interest an individual displays from participation in the activity. Sign is the value placed upon the activity by the participant as a form of self expression. Centrality indicates the importance the activity has in the participant's lifestyle (Beaton et al., 2009). Combined, these items produce a comprehensive description of participant involvement. The present research addresses these items by specifically investigating individual's motivations for participation.

Constraints

The Iwasaki and Havitz (1998) model includes an important antecedent that is omitted from the PCM measurement, constraints. Intrapersonal and structural constraints are said to influence the formation of an individual's sport participation involvement (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998). These may include the prospective participant's inability to gather informational resources to obtain adequate skill training in the activity (Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey, 1993). Additionally, a physical limitation and injury or lack of financial resources may hinder one's ability to perform the behavior. From a social structural standpoint,

participants may find pressure from society in the form of certain role expectations which may also decrease participation in the activity.

These pressures may come in the form of role conflict, when the requirements of one role encumber the ability to properly fulfill the requirements of other roles. Often, adult sport event participants exhibit multiple life roles such as family member, employee, and sport participant. The notion of a person holding several role relationships with different individuals is what Goode (1960) called a role set and contended that if the individual fully commits to one role, fulfillment in the others will be difficult. This is especially true when there is a limited amount of resources available to spend on each role (Bruening & Dixon, 2007) or as an individual has conceptualized role involvement as an important aspect of their life (Frone & Rice, 1987). As such, the effect of constraints has been added to the present investigation.

Research Questions

In an attempt to shed light on recent participation trends and the behaviors of an increasingly influential group, the purpose of this study was to explore Generation Y sport/leisure involvement in comparison to older endurance event participants. This investigation included how the activity was introduced, as well as the motivations and constraints faced in sport participation. Thus, the following research questions were considered:

RQ1: How are individuals introduced to endurance event participation?

RQ2: What are the motivations for endurance event participation?

RQ3: What obstacles exist in endurance event participation?

RQ4: How do Generation Y and non-Generation Y cohort members differ in their introduction to, motivation to participate in, and obstacles found in participating in endurance events?

Method

A qualitative approach was predominantly used in the current analysis to achieve the purpose of this study. Still, the current research has applied use of qualitative methods for interview sample selection, sample analysis, and PCM staging, while qualitative methods were utilized to answer the research questions.

Quantitative Sample Selection

The research setting for this study included online endurance communities (Tough Mudder and Slowtwitch forums as well as Warrior Dash and New York Road Runners Facebook pages) and a variety of events (a half marathon, a women's obstacle course event, and long-distance triathlon) in a Midwestern city within the United States. The online communities were intended to attract higher identified participants while the live events offered the best opportunity to capture

a more diverse group. Posts made in online communities stated the overall purpose of the study and asked for volunteer participants. The researcher also recruited participants in person at the finish area of a half marathon, women's obstacle course event, and long-distance triathlon in a Midwestern city. Individuals were approached and asked if they had participated in an endurance event (defined as an obstacle course event over five miles or a road race event 13.1 miles or longer) in the past 24 months and interested in completing a survey.

Individuals were asked to complete a 26-item questionnaire either online (for online endurance communities) or in person on paper (for endurance events attendees). Surveys assessed the types of events individuals had participated, their levels of involvement with those events, as well some demographic information, and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The final question asked respondents if they would be interested in continuing with the research project by participating in an in-depth interview at a later date. Of the 134 individuals who completed the survey, 36 (26.9%) indicated an interest in continuing the research process.

The quantitative data was used to select a sample for cross-group comparative analysis, Generation Y with non-Generation Y members across differing levels of involvement. This multi-case sampling approach would allow a comparison of data between different demographic and psychological clusters and assist with not only the purpose of the research but also the confidence and validity of the findings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). It was established that of the 107 survey participants answering a question regarding their age; 54 (50.5%) were Generation Y, 36 (33.6%) were Generation X, and 17 (15.9%) were Baby Boomer members. For purposes of this study, the Generation Y group was established to be born from 1977 through 1994 at the time of the data collection, the older non-Generation Y group was born between 1976 and 1946.

For descriptive purposes, levels of involvement would be categorized according to Funk and James' (2001) PCM. To assign respondents to their stage of awareness, attraction, attachment, or allegiance, the researcher followed the procedures outlined in Beaton et al. (2009). Once scores of sign, centrality, and pleasure facets were calculated for each individual, a staging algorithm was utilized to rank all respondents (Beaton et al., 2009). Of the participants who completed this portion of the survey ($n=103$) the classifications are as follows: 6 (5.9%) in awareness, 15 (14.7%) in attraction, 40 (39.2%) in attachment, and 41 (40.2%) in allegiance.

Qualitative Methodology

Survey respondents within each represented generational cohort and involvement level, which had participated in an endurance event within the last 24 months and indicated interest in continuing with the study, were randomly contacted to arrange an interview. Interviews were conducted over the phone and lasted between 25 and 40 minutes in length. They addressed three major areas regarding endurance sport participation: (a) sport introduction; (b) involvement; including

sign, centrality and pleasure; and (c) attitudinal and psychological commitment or their resistance to change behavior.

A total of 12 interviews were conducted. This number was not set a priori. Instead, it was dictated by suggestions made by Miles et al (2014), which recommended decisions regarding interview sample size not be based on statistical grounds, but when the researcher felt no new information on the topics of interest were being developed, and a desirable level of confidence in the analytic generalizations has been satisfied. An even number of non-Generation Y members ($n = 6$) and Generation Y members ($n = 6$) were required to reach such saturation. Attention was given to the unequal sex representation, with nine males (75%) and three females (25%), but it was determined the overall purpose of the study was not gender comparison and the after initial data analysis, trends across genders indicated there would be minimal impact on the ability to properly address the research purpose and research questions. Table 1 provides a complete list of interviewees by generational cohort with level of PCM stage.

Table 1

Interviewee Generational Cohort Assignments

Generation Y	Generation X	Baby Boomer
Samuel ⁴ (male)	Skyler ⁴ (female)	Marie ⁴ (female)
Jesse ⁴ (male)		Walter ⁴ (male)
Todd ² (male)		Hank ⁴ (male)
Peter ³ (male)		Gus ⁴ (male)
Flint ⁴ (male)		Saul ³ (male)
Lydia ² (female)		

Note: PCM stage assignment; Awareness¹, Attraction², Attachement³, Allegiance⁴

Analysis

A combination of coding techniques and methods deemed appropriate by Miles et al. (2014) was utilized in the current evaluation. The data were analyzed to gain a greater understanding of the participation behaviors, motivations, and constraints for members of each group. After every interview, the audio file was either sent to a third-party transcription service or transcribed by the researcher. Upon receipt, the coding process began.

From the onset of coding, the researcher kept analytic memos regarding general thoughts about the research. These memos documented reflections of the data and assisted with theme generation (Miles et al., 2014). As more first-cycle codes appeared and analytical insights were recorded, a transition into second-cycle coding occurred, where first-cycle materials are pulled together into parsimonious groups (Miles et al., 2014). This shift allowed the researcher to condense the information into analytic units.

In the case of this research, second cycle coding was carried out at two levels. First, meta-codes were created from the research question categories of interest: sport introduction, motivations, and obstacles. The identification of these meta-codes assisted with the organization of the data to classify codes under their research question of interest. While meta-codes could be considered deductive, the next level of second cycle coding, which connected the meta-codes with original first cycle codes were inductive in nature. During the second level, these sub-codes were identified and placed within larger meta-code families. By referring to a complete code list, analytic memos, meta-codes, and appropriate literature, the researcher began drafting definitions for each of the sub-codes and placed them into units under each meta-code. The researcher then reviewed the interview context of every code to authenticate it with its sub-code definition. A complete list of meta-codes and sub-codes can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Meta-Code and Sub-Code Definitions

Meta-Code	Sub-Code	Definition
Introduction	Literal	Indications that some member of their social circle introduced them to the sport.
	Historical	Indications about how active they were as youth and whether that had an impact on their transition into endurance sport.
Motivation	Achievement	The ability to obtain motivation from the satisfaction found in personal accomplishments, challenges, competition, goal achievement, self-improvement, reward for effort, and the enjoyment of overcoming obstacles.
	Emotion	When a participant displayed feelings of fun, event euphoria, and nostalgia, or felt the need to feed one's own celebrity status.
	Social	Motivations derived from camaraderie with fellow participants and belongingness they feel within the community.
	Health	Beneficial physical and mental health outcomes associated with event participation and switching to endurance sport participation after boredom from other healthy physical activities present themselves.
	Nature	Motivations of activity participation stemming from being in nature.
Obstacles	Physical	Possible negative effects in participation due to injury or age.
	Resources	Influence of financial and time (i.e., work and family) commitments.
	Negotiation	The need and ability to make adjustments needed to continue participation.

To address complications that may have presented themselves with multiple research questions, a detailed conceptually clustered matrix was created. The rows were broken down into the two main sample categories, Generation Y and non-Generation Y, with each row containing a single interview participant assigned to the appropriate generational cohort. The columns were similarly clustered. Each individual column represented a sub-code group collected under its assigned meta-code. Within each cell, quotes from the interview text were presented. All coded text, which fit within the definitions of the sub-codes were moved into the cells. See Table 3 for an example. This visual representation was not only another way to check the codes against the sub-code definitions, but also began to shape the saliency of each sub-code category within the sample groups.

Reliability and Validity

Before results are described, questions about the reliability and validity of the analysis are considered. Miles et al. (2014) outlined tactics to confirm qualitative findings: providing a procedural account of research activities, checking for analytic bias, inspection for representativeness, and triangulations. Collectively, these efforts should reassure trustworthiness of the current results. To address the first reliability tactic, the researcher has provided, within this manuscript, a full account of the methods and analysis procedures employed during this study. For example, sample selection and the coding process have been provided. Next, the researcher was attentive to the possibility of analytic bias and controlled for forms such as holistic fallacy, elite bias, and personal bias. These form of bias were avoided by allowing for even representation of the data, which was double checked by trusting the frequency of data codes for the most representative and never dismissing more infrequent codes and themes.

One way to confirm the validity of the data is by checking for representativeness. To this end, decisions regarding sampling, such as choosing multi-case sampling, were made to alleviate the potential of this bias. Additionally, the researcher does not claim the study represents all endurance athletes. Instead, it merely provides an overview of the current sample of Generation Y and older participants. The next defense to achieve valid results was to generate converging conclusions from an assortment of measures by triangulating the data. For this research study, both data and methodological triangulation was applied. Altogether, the data represented reasonable outcomes. When inconsistencies did exist, the researcher drafted analytic memos to those points and were held to a higher standard of analysis by searching for the potential of their existence in other data.

Results

Sport Introduction

Interview participants were encouraged to discuss how they were introduced to endurance sports. The bulk of participants expressed some form of literal in-

Table 3
Concept Matrix Example

Name	Introduction			Motives			
	Literal	Historical	Achievement	Social	Health	Emotion	Nature
Marie	My sister said she was running and I thought,	In New Zealand it's a mostly outdoorsy country. A lot of our childhood is active without being structured.	Wow, I've actually done it. I could've been in bed.	I tend to do on my own because I hate being let down by other people.	Also just being out there alone, knowing that you're doing it, knowing all the benefits of doing it.	I think definitely the feeling of crossing the finish line and that post-race euphoria.	I run in a beautiful country so I get a lot of that.
	"Bigger that, if she can do it I can do it."						
Flint	The warrior dash led into just me and a couple of buddies decided that we wanted to try something that we'd never done before.	I played baseball, soccer, basketball ever since I was five all the way through high school.	That I've completed something that may be in the past I couldn't have. The training and working out all of it can lead to a goal, and it did.	I think we were all kind of keeping each other excited about it.		This is just another opportunity for some of us to one keep our youth and then two prove to ourselves that we're capable of doing something like this.	

Note: To accommodate for the limited space, the Obstacles meta-code was removed and a condensed version of only two respondents is presented.

introduction to the sport, while fewer also talked about their sporting life history or experiences with other physical activity types.

Literal introduction. A literal introduction to the sport indicated who essentially introduced the endurance activity to the participant. Most individuals, 7 of 12 interviewees, indicated some member of their social circle, friends and family, introduced them to the sport. Sometimes their influence was deliberate, asking the interviewee if they want to sign up for events. Skyler, for example, stated, “A friend of mine does a personal challenge every year... and sent me a link to Tough Mudder and said, ‘Do you want to do it with me?’ So I immediately signed up.” This influence is similar to an antecedent of involvement, social support, described in the Iwasaki and Havitz (1998) model. Other times the social introduction is more implied.

For Saul, the influence was more indirect because social circle members did not ask him specifically to do the race with him but took hints from conversations and social media posts. Similarly, Marie described how she got started running, “I was walking each morning as fitness and my sister said she was running and I thought, bummer that, if she can do it, I can do it.” These examples displayed the power of word of mouth and social influence. These social circles proved to play an integral part in the activity choices of these adults and their position as recruiters for endurance events may very well provide the greatest point of introduction for many of their participants.

Historical introduction. The second sub-code, historical introduction, revealed some indications about how active participants were as youth. While former athletic participation or more recent military behaviors did seem to positively influence the participants in overcoming any initial apprehension towards activity participation, it was not necessary for individuals to have these experiences. In consideration of whether early sport participation had any effect in their later transition into endurance sports, some specified they were active or athletic youth, while others indicated a less positive athletic experience in their childhood.

It seems Samuel never stopped running, “I’ve been running since I was very little. I started running around the block, and made it two blocks, and then just kept going, wanting to seek out more distance.” Hank played sports but indicated he was not very good, “After three years of Little League, I got one foul tip. That was my hitting life, foul tips.” Lydia was similar in that she did not consider herself as much of an athlete, “I was definitely not an athlete as a child at all, we always had to run in gym class... and I always hated it... and I had no hand-eye coordination.” Another, more recent influence, was the presence of a military lifestyle. A couple of the participants mentioned how a this background assisted with the introduction the activity and provided a motivation to participate.

Motivations

Motivations are an important personal antecedent of involvement in the Iwasaki and Havitz (1998) model. A wide range of motivations were present in the

data, especially for the non-Generation Y group. Overall, five motivational categories emerged: (a) achievement, (b) emotion, (c) social, (d) health, and (e) nature. Frequency results indicated achievement was the most commonly mentioned motivator, with all but one participant indicating its presence. Social, health, and emotion motivations were also important, as more than half of the interviewees indicated some motivations from each category. Lastly, the positive effects of being in nature were mentioned in two interviews.

Achievement. This category was defined as the ability to obtain motivation from the satisfaction found in personal accomplishments, challenges, competition, goal achievement, self-improvement, reward for effort, and the enjoyment of overcoming obstacles within endurance sport. Interestingly, not all who sought personal challenges also indicated they participated in these events for competitive reasons. Marie, for example, seemed inspired by her accomplishments, “Wow, I’ve actually done that (completed a long run). I could have been in bed.” Hank displayed similar wonder when thinking back to some of his longer hill runs, “You can’t believe you were all the way down there. That’s where you were, and now you are looking at it, you know. You kind of look at your legs and say, ‘Wow, how did this happen?’”

Others enjoyed setting goals and doing the required work to complete an endurance event. Skyler, for one, liked to set new objectives for each race, such as running two laps instead of the single lap required for most obstacle events. Walter mentioned the reward he felt, “In running you directly feel the effects of your training... you work for a long time and it comes together.” Jesse talked about the journey found in self-development and its presence in endurance sport, “I’m motivated by self-improvement, and all of those things are pretty in your face when you’re running.” For the vast majority of this study sample, it seemed achievement is very relevant.

Emotion. The next motivational category, emotion, was identified when a participant displayed feelings of fun, event euphoria, and nostalgia. Marie said, “I think the (best) feeling is crossing the finish line and that postrace euphoria.” Skyler echoed this sentiment, “I’m still buzzing from last weekend.” Flint, a Generation Y member, demonstrated a feeling of nostalgia at events, “This is just another opportunity for some of us to keep our youth.” Saul, a non-Generation Y member, mentioned, “It whispered back to that old Marine in me.” And Skyler, another non-Generation Y participant, said, “This is a chance for me to be a seven-year-old girl again.”

Social. The third most common motivation found in this sample of endurance sport participants is social based. The social category included motivations derived from camaraderie with fellow participants and the sense of belongingness they feel within the community as a participant.

The social aspect increased the appeal of running for Samuel, “Now, with the crew I run with, it’s definitely spiked more interest. And it keeps me motivated to

wake up in the morning and get out there with them, so it's definitely increased my love for the sport." Todd experienced a similar effect within his sport community, "I'm more a part of the community now. So when I travel to races... it's awesome because I know a lot of people."

Health. The next motivation sub-category, health, is described as beneficial physical and mental health outcomes associated with event participation and switching to endurance sport participation after boredom from other healthy physical activities present themselves. Some participants started running in response to personal or family health issues. Jesse stated, "My wake-up call was my father passing away... from something that was actually heart related. So I felt it was probably a good time for me to think about getting in shape again and avoid something like that." Hank found motivation in the weight loss he was experienced when first beginning to run, "I was very, very overweight. Finally got on a treadmill... and lost about 50 to 60 pounds. I started getting very bored on a treadmill, so I started running outside and have been doing it ever since."

Nature. The final motivation category to appear in the data was the motivation of activity participation stemming from being in nature. Peter linked nature with a sense of nostalgia, "I was in the boy scouts in middle school and elementary school, and we sort of hiked and like spent a lot of times outdoors in some of the places that I now run." And Marie indicated she felt the effects of nature when she runs, "There's an awful lot of sense of being in the aura of nature. I run in a beautiful country so I get a lot of that." While not as influential as some other categories, its presence cannot be overlooked.

Obstacles

Another antecedent of involvement present in the current data is the influence of constraints. The respondents all expressed either having obstacles or the thinking about their potential to hinder desired endurance activity pursuits. The current findings suggest two major categories of obstacles; those that pose a physical threat and those that consume valuable resources. In addition, respondents also noted the importance of negotiating conflicts which create obstacles to participation.

Physical. The most often cited obstacles, expressed in 10 of 12 interviews, were physical in type. Some of the participants feared the potential of injury; others had first-hand experiences, and a few mentioned nagging injuries they deal with on almost a daily basis. Marie stated, "I plan to (continue running)...as long as I enjoy it and as long as I'm healthy and my body lasts." Todd and Walter talked about how they were prone to overtraining, but education and experience has allowed them to stay relatively injury free these days.

Resources. Another common obstacle was the influence of financial stresses encountered in endurance sport participation. These obstacles are defined as the pressures presented by resource allocation in the pursuit of endurance sport participation. This obstacle may result in the reluctance of some recreational runners

or joggers to participate in events. Even Marie, an avid event participant, stated, "I've pretty much run out of the ones I want to do in New Zealand so I do have to look further afield, and that becomes expensive."

The next most often mentioned resource obstacle sub-category was work, followed by family pressures. Hank described what some would call an unusual schedule to fit in his running around work, "I'll squeeze in like a four-mile run... at five o'clock in the morning." Skyler described these obstacles as something she has been able to manage, "I'll just go out for a little run now and again when I can fit it in around the children and my husband's work and my work."

Negotiation. Endurance training takes time and commitment. Thus, participants often find ways to negotiate their particular pressure points. Five respondents indicated they have either learned how to fit endurance event participation into their world or made specific life adjustments to overcome obstacles. Some people, like Samuel, just get up early and train before the rest of the family is awake. Others indicated the importance of scheduling and flexibility when participating in endurance events. For example, Jesse stated, "I don't have obstacles because I plan a lot around running... you gotta schedule that time and make it a priority."

Generational Cohort Comparisons

In sum, individuals in all cohorts exhibited both similar and dissimilar relationships with endurance sport participation. Both the Generation Y group and non-Generation Y members experienced similar introduction experiences, as social groups were mainly responsible for their initiation. The slight difference was that one of the Generation Y members stated that he and his friends choose their specific event based on a Groupon discount. Similarities and differences were also present between the generational groups in their motivations for participating in endurance events

When explaining motivations for participation, the Generation Y group's responses were mainly limited to a single category, personal achievement. The non-Generation Y group exhibited a more diverse range of stimuli. Of the three remaining sub-categories, emotion, social, health, and nature, only one Generation Y participant mentioned each, while multiple non-Generation Y interviewees specified examples of each.

Similar to introductions and motivations, obstacles for endurance sport participation are both similar and different between the generational cohorts. Both expressed concerns with the possibility of injury limiting their ability to participate. But non-Generation Y members linked age with an increase in injury potential, while Generation Y members did not. The groups also varied in how they viewed financial obstacles. More Generation Y participants mentioned the effect of this obstacle. While some of the non-Generation Y group expressed limited financial concerns, those who did had other financial responsibilities, such as fami-

lies, that necessitated a balanced approach. Conversely, the Generation Y members failed to mention any negative effect work played in their ability to participate in endurance events while the non-Generation Y group displayed some obstacles in this area. Regardless of age, obstacle negotiation was a key skill in continuing endurance sport participation. A full generational cohort comparison, by meta-code, can be found on Table 4.

Table 4

Meta-Codes by Generational Cohort

Meta-Code	Generation Y	Non-Generation Y
Introduction	Indicated both literal and historical introduction influences. One respondent stated how event choice was persuaded by online sales promotion.	Indicated both literal and historical introduction influences.
Motivation	All members specified a form of achievement motivation. Only one or two members mentioned each of the other categories: social, health, and emotion.	Displayed greater diversity in their motivations. Health reasons were the most common course motivation, followed by social reasons.
Obstacles	Injury most common obstacle. Financial concerns apparent. No mention of work related obstacles.	Injury most common obstacle, but linked with being caused by age. Limited financial concerns expressed. Some work obstacles exist.

Discussion and Implications

Some evidence is beginning to show a shift away from traditional team sport participation. It may be that the impressing influence of Generation Y is partially responsible. The current research was set to view their experiences within endurance events. To do this, a comparison between older generational cohorts was considered. In sum, individuals in all cohorts exhibited similar introductions to the sport, with social groups being mainly responsible for their initiation. Other similarities between the groups were shared achievement motivations and the presence of obstacles, though the specifics varied between groups. Oddly, the majority of Generation Y motivations were contained within the achievement category, while non-Generation Y members found a more diverse range of motivations.

A reoccurring theme throughout the study was the influence of social groups on participant behavior. This is not a surprise, as leisure/sport models have demonstrated their influence in the past (Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998). These groups have not only introduced the majority of study participants to the endurance sport but also serve as a source of motivation for continued involvement. The examples where social groups introduced other members to the sport displayed the power of word of mouth as an impactful antecedent to involvement and an important marketing strategy. Marketers have understood the strength of such messaging for years (Lim & Chung, 2013), but it seems to be especially relevant for this sample of endurance athletes. Traditional marketing channels can be expensive for smaller event producers and is minimally used. This high cost, coupled with the lack of a star power, commonly available in more traditional sports, leads to endurance sport organizers relying on more natural sources of communication. Therefore, social circles are proving to play an integral part in the leisure choices of these adults and their position as recruiters for endurance events may very well provide the greatest point of introduction for many participants.

Despite the social influence at the introductory stage for all generational cohorts, the non-Generation Y group exhibited more social motivations than the current group of Generation Y members. This endorses the research of Ogles and Masters (2000), which found that runner motivations differ between age groups. They asserted that younger runners were more motivated by personal goal achievement, while older runners enjoyed the social affiliation with others, in addition to other health and well-being factors. It may be that younger runners find acceptable amounts of their social affiliations through other outlets and their non-endurance social networks, while older runners use sport to interact with like-minded individuals, who may be more difficult as they grow older and further removed from past social circles.

Another interesting takeaway from these results is the effect personal achievement had on participation, especially within the Generational Y cohort. Previous research (Jeffrey & Butryn, 2012; Summers, Machin, & Sargent, 1983; Summers, Sargent, Levey, & Murray, 1982) has indicated similar reasons why individuals begin participating in running, yet limited research has been conducted to see if the effect continues as involvement and commitment to the sport increases. The current research suggests individual achievement is present throughout all participant levels. For this reason, endurance sport marketers should continue to create opportunities to test participants within their events. Recently, the Tough Mudder obstacle race has added the ability to run multiple course loops for special registrants. The Walt Disney World Marathon Weekend has also grown from a single event to a Goofy's Race and a Half Challenge (full and half marathon on the same weekend) and even a Dopey Challenge (a 5K, 10K, full and half marathon in four days) to build even more unique challenges within the event weekend.

While personal achievement exhibited influence across all generational cohorts, the influence of other motivations was limited within Generation Y members. Only one or two members of Generation Y mentioned the other forms of motivation, while the older cohorts exhibited a greater range of motivations. One source of motivation was the residual effect following the days after crossing the finish line. Postevent highs have been utilized by sport marketers for their ability to translate into sales. Official merchandisers of championship events, such as the World Series or NCAA Basketball Championship, have leveraged the emotions of winning fans by blitzing advertising messages immediately following the event. Similarly, many endurance events promote finisher gear in the finish area or award ceremonies. Still, further opportunities to use finisher emotions to the benefit of the organization are available. If prepared in advance, registration for next year can be offered to those in attendance. Better yet, marketers may begin to combine insights from this study. For example, promotions can be used to encourage recent participants, still feeling an event high, to share their event experiences and introduce their friends to the event. In return for their services, the event producer may offer a discount on future registration. Thus, the marketer has the ability to combine both the social introduction influence with emotional motivators.

Another emotional motivation has practical implication for event producers. A number of the participants within the non-Generation Y cohort and one Generation Y member expressed feelings of nostalgia when participating in endurance events. Whether running through the mud, participating with old military buddies, or just the freedom of being outdoors, there seems to be a connection between sport and remembering the past. In general, people just seem to enjoy recollecting the past. Case in point, the recent popularity of #ThrowBackThursday on social media outlets or even throwback prices to celebrate restaurant anniversaries. Sport marketers could continue to push creative campaigns which place the consumer in familiar places or state of mind.

While they were not the most frequently cited motivations, being in nature and health outcomes, were present for some participants. Individuals with full-time office employment and demanding requirements at home may find limited opportunity to be outside. Running and other outdoor activities may serve as an excuse to enjoy nature and stay fit. Endurance athletes, especially those which are older, also seem to commence and continue physical activity for health reasons. Certain demographic groups are overly prone to heart disease and obesity (CDC, 2014). Endurance event producers may communicate directly to these issues and offer solutions in an enjoyable and social environment. They may also promote the stress and weight reducing tendencies of the sport.

Health in endurance sport participation may not only be a motivator but also an obstacle. Obstacles and constraints are an important antecedent to leisure/sport participation and need to be understood (Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998). Other barriers include limited resources, such as time and money. Event organizers need

to be aware of such constraints and make efforts to curb their influences. This may be done through education. Offering training advice and programs may reduce the possibility of overtraining, improper form or footwear, and other common issues faced with endurance sport. Because most respondents indicated they would continue to participate in these events as long as their bodies would allow them, this area begs for the attention of endurance sport organizations.

Another important barrier for some is the resource requirements. Similar to health, education and social support may alleviate the pressure of time restraints. Financial obstacles may be somewhat more difficult to moderate. Equipment, entry fees, event travel, club membership, and coaching / training are some of the potential costs associated with endurance events. Evidence from the current research shows how financial concerns may limit participation from both those new to the sport and veterans alike. Practitioners will want to make sure costs are not too high to deflect new consumers. Additionally, even highly involved and identified event participants have a cap on how much they are willing or able to spend on their sport. For this reason, loyalty programs or special services may be appropriate to retain repeat participants.

As previously mentioned, the different cohorts exhibited both similar and dissimilar relationships with endurance sport participation. Understanding these is important to sport marketers as they attempt to communicate with both segments. Parallel messages may be produced where they are similar, such as social group word of mouth introductions and personal achievement motivations. Divergent messages may be more appropriate where motivations and constraints differ between the generational cohorts, such as health and social motivations and obstacles. A full breakdown of these differences can be found on Table 4.

Limitations and Future Research

While the current study sheds light on the sport participation behaviors within one category, further investigation will be needed to completely understand into the current phenomena. Efforts were made to produce a diverse sample; still, the current research is limited to explain the relationship a small group of individuals have with endurance sport participation. Practitioners and researcher alike would benefit from future studies on the behaviors and connections individuals make with their leisure and sport activities of choice. Understanding generational cohort differences is important as the demographic landscape changes. In addition to generational cohort examination, researchers could examine differences and similarities between participant segments based on behavioral or psychological variables.

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